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William Rimmer's Concept of the Heroic Male Nude

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WILLIAM RIMMER'S CONCEPT OF THE HEROIC MALE NUDE

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

Figure Page

INTRODUCTION

William Rimmer is an enigmatic figure in the history of American art. Works created by him are the single exception to an otherwise undistinguished body of mid-nineteenth century sculpture. Yet, Rimmer was virtually ignored by the art public of his generation. In his own lifetime the considerable skill and talent Rimmer evinced as a sculptor and draftsman were overshadowed by the novelty of his medical practice and teaching career. Rimmer's only true fame was to come not as an artist, but from the popular success of his "art anatomy" lecture courses in Boston and New York. Acknowledgement of the excellence of his teaching method and drawing skill, however, must have been insufficient praise to a man seeking artistic celebrity. The closed eye of the American art public could only have increased the existing feelings of frustration in Rimmer and made more bitter the fate he believed had been dealt him. Ironically, his fatalistic view of life became both the wellspring and circumscription of his artistic expression. William Rimmer's importance in the American art scene of the mid-nineteenth century is lost in the maze of contradiction that was his life.

Excepting a series of trade-oriented apprenticeships, William Rimmer was a self-taught artist. As an anatomist

and physician he was also self-taught; his heavily annotated copies of Cruveilhier and Gray, and participation in dissection at the Boston Medical College attest to Rimmer's serious independent study of human anatomy. His exhaustive knowledge of the human body resulted in a license to practice medicine and a peerless ability to render the human figure in intricate postures.

The anatomy of the nude male figure was William Rimmer's lifelong study and became his chosen expressive vehicle. His descriptive studies of human emotion conveyed by posture and composition began at age fifteen with a small carved gypsum nude and continued with little deviation until his death.[1] Rimmer's male figures were remarkable for both their emotional expression and emphatic nudity. The nude in American sculpture at mid-century was only acceptable with a moralistic or didactic context and Rimmer's male figures were uncomfortably naked in flesh and expression to the nineteenth century eye. William Rimmer reintroduced to mid-nineteenth century sculpture the Hellenistic concept of the heroic figure. He introduced it to an unprepared and unsympathetic American audience. Rimmer's male nudes stand out against the derivative classicism of Greenough, Story, and Crawford. In their postures Rimmer's figures express the struggle of man against Fate. Attaining a singular vitality, his idealized personages were substantially different from the often overstated and sentimental renderings of Story and Powers. This expressive force came from within Rimmer himself

and was the autobiographical note within his sculptural work. Rimmer's male nude figures are shown most often in combat, either actual or anticipated, for Rimmer remarked, "We live in this world not by let, but by opposition."[2] Rimmer imbued his heroic male figures with an outward physical power to overcome their implicit foes but shows them most often as victims in seemingly involuntary postures of death. The heroic male nudes of Rimmer are indicative of the confused secret that governed the artist's life. Their interpretation is also the interpretation of the destructive effects of Rimmer's heritage. The anatomical studies from life are ultimately contradicted in his artistic articulation of the male figure. Postures of writhing musculature assume overblown proportion, physiques become parodies of strength. Rimmer's heroes are often sexless, their genital region reduced to an unresolved pelvic triangle. This act of omission is a disturbing fact in the art of an anatomist. His seeming emasculation of the male nude is not explained by artistic convention, nor by adherence to social prudery. William Rimmer's male figures are intensely personal expressions and provide a key to what it was that made his sculpture remarkable and his career a failure.

An analysis of the life of William Rimmer finds its necessary starting point in an 1897 biography written by Truman Bartlett. Bartlett shared an interest in sculpture with Rimmer and his sympathetic record of the doctor's life is rich with praise of his unrecognized genius. The

Art Life of William Rimmer, as Bartlett aptly titled his volume, offers an intimate portrait of Rimmer as a father, teacher, and struggling artist. Bartlett shared a close correspondence with Rimmer's daughter Caroline and this afforded him a greater understanding of Rimmer's personality and life than that available to later scholars. His acquaintance with Rimmer, however, may have clouded his appraisal of Rimmer's work and artistic importance. As a source of primary material,however, the Art Life is without peer. Bartlett devoted two appendices to the comments of Rimmer and those of his students.

William Rimmer authored two books in his lifetime. The Art Anatomy (1877) and Elements of Design (1891) were both outgrowths of his teaching career and essays on his philosophy of art instruction. They provide examples of Rimmer's study of phrenology and the comparative analysis of the expression of emotion in man and animals. Rimmer's admonitions to the unseen pupil in these two texts also help define his attitudes toward appropriate subject matter and the handling of the figure, especially the male, as a vehicle of expression.

William Rimmer's belief in fatalism has been intimated since the writing of Truman Bartlett. Yet most authors do not explore the hypothesis of its inescapable control over William Rimmer's artistic treatment of the male figure. Fatalism has not been adduced as a driving force in Rimmer's figural work nor as accounting for his consistent deviation from what he knew to be accurate anatomical depiction.

Fatalism has also been excepted from the explanation of what it was that caused Rimmer to undermine his chances of artistic celebrity. It is the purpose of this study to elucidate how fatalistic beliefs did in fact influence Rimmer's articulation of the heroic male nude.

CHAPTER ONE

American Sculpture Before William Rimmer

American sculpture between c. 1775 and c. 1820 was little more than the production of architectural ornament and maritime figureheads. By 1820, however, the native carving tradition experienced a rapid metamorphosis. The career of William Rush, (1756-1833), best represents the attempt of native carvers to achieve a monumental sculptural style in America. Rush who was essentially a gifted wood carver carried his skills to their technical and stylistic limits in his figure of George Washington, (fig. 1).[1] His painted pine depiction of the nation's forefather sought to emulate the marble counterparts of European sculptors such as Houdon and Canova. His use of a column fragment alludes to the classical idiom to which he aspired.

The Washington of Rush is representative of the character of American sculpture in the early nineteenth century. As with painting, the first popular form of sculpture was the portrait. The commemoration of Revolutionary heroes established a tradition of morally inspiring personages swathed in equally noble classical drapery. Fidelity to the features and perfection of surface indicated the degree of success achieved by a Yankee sculptor.

The American taste for edifying subject matter over-

Figure 1: George Washington, William Rush, 1814

shadowed the pure contemplation of form for form's sake alone. The adoption of a Neoclassical mode met the criteria of early American audiences. In classical forms one read stability, durability, and integrity. These qualities were sought after by the young nation to affirm its national ideals and to inspire its populace. In both architecture and in sculpture the Neoclassical model became the standard for artistic success.

America acquired her Neoclassical tastes directly from European models. Early sculptural commissions seldom went to native artists, and were instead offered to Canova and Houdon. Their portrayals of George Washington decorated the capitol buildings of both Virginia and North Carolina as early as 1796.[2] The public display and government approval of these two artists formed the standard by which sculpture would be judged in America.

The importation of foreign marbles and sculptors set in the American mind a bias toward the work of Europeans as superior to that of the native artists. As the Atlantic "whitened" with the purchase of European sculptures, ambitious young American sculptors crossed the Atlantic in search of both instruction and patronage.

The most successful and reknowned of this group was Hiram Powers, (1805-1873). Powers was able to parlay his limited artistic talents and boundless business acumen into an unmatched sculptural reputation. From his Florentine studio he handled sculpture as a business venture and asked

and received previously unimagined sums for his statues. It was Powers' "Yankee ingenuity", rather than his sculptural genius that earned him the title, "Yankee Canova".[3] Nevertheless, Powers remained in the minds of the American art public the measure of his sculptural generation.

Powers, Story, Crawford, and Palmer were not alone in their preoccupation with Europe. Italy, especially, was full of expatriates and these artistic and literary wanderers formed a close company. An illuminationg comment on the personality of Hiram Powers comes from Nathaniel Hawthorne. The author, while travelling through Italy, spent a considerable amount of time in the company of Powers and his family. Hawthorne wrote of an afternoon with Powers in his French and Italian Notebooks,

> I have hardly ever before felt an impulse to write down a man's conversation as I do that of Mr. Powers. The chief reason is, probably, that it is so possible to do it, his ideas being square, solid, and tangible, and therefore readily grasped and obtained.[4]

Hawthorne could as easily have been describing the sculpture of Hiram Powers. Powers sculpted, or directed his troop of Italian masons to sculpt exquisite, solid forms believeable in every detail to the human eye. His reliance on the classical Venus figure in conjunction with didactic Christian themes endowed his work with aesthetic and moral respectability. For Powers sculpture was a business and he applied himself in making use of sentiment and didacticism, to his greatest financial gain.

Powers' most successful wedding of these two ideas is embodied in his Greek Slave, (fig. 2), of 1850.[5] Exhibited in the London Crystal Palace in 1851, it was an instant sensation. The Greek Slave combined the triumph of Christian virtue with the tragedy of subjugation in a strikingly beautiful female nude. Powers successfully carried off his presentation of the nude female by transforming the interpretation of the undraped figure previously held by the art public. Powers metaphorically clothed his chained goddess with the mantle of Christian faith in the face of brute pagan slavery. He obviated the thought of viewing the Slave as a sensual embodiment of the female form. Powers' transformation was so successful that an initially skeptical New England clergy ended up hailing the Greek Slave from their pulpits as a paragon of Christian virtue and an essay on the power to the faith.[6] For his own part Powers was eminently satisfied with his fame and twenty-five thousand dollars earned from sales of the work.

Power's success spawned a whole series of bound "Venuses". Erastus Dow Palmer unveiled a near copy of Powers' Slave which he titled White Captive, (fig. 3), in 1855.[7] Palmer likewise sought to improve upon his work's classical antecedents through the imposition of an "inner Life".[8] This inner life was the redeeming Christian spirit and was not to be understood as anything inherent in the material form. Powers, Palmer, and other sculptors such as Thomas Crawford were all masters of such narrative sentiment which superseded the exploration of new and expressive forms.

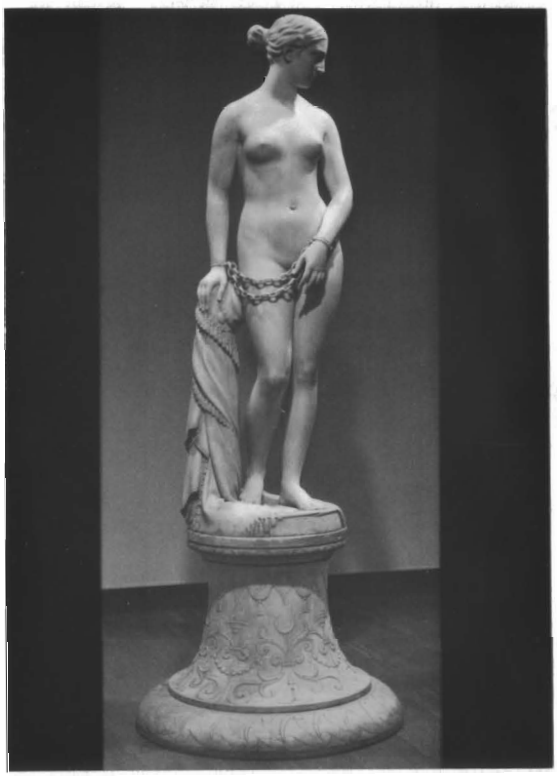

Figure 2: Greek Slave, 1843, Hiram Powers.

Figure 3: White Captive, 1855, Erastus Dow Palmer

These men all relied upon a literary interpretation of their work. The work of each man was often accompanied by a considerable text in the form of statements, either personal or published, to define the specific meaning in each form. Of his Orpheus, (fig. 4), carved in 1839, Crawford wrote:

> ...into the face I shall endeavor to throw an expression of intense anxiety softened by the awe which would naturally be caused by such a sight as we may suppose the realms of Pluto to represent...[9]

Examination of the form evokes little more than a histrionic understanding of an "intense anxiety" or awe at the journey into Hades. Crawford felt that, "anyone having the slightest knowledge of mythology must know that the figure is Orpheus in search of Eurydice."[10] This literary base of expression became the norm for the art public, and meaning in the visual arts was confined to literary associations. Such a derivative mode eliminated the possibility for personal expression and largely denied sculpture any sense of formal evolution.

By mid-century, American sculpture stood as an amalgam of classicism and mildly observed naturalism. Sculpture sought to convey noble virtues and commemorate national heroes. The sublime and the grotesque, the real and the ideal were all covered in an even coat of sentimentalism.[11] American sculpture had achieved a remarkable sameness, the work of one hand became largely indistinguishable from another.[12] The single exception to this sculptural sameness spent the majority of his life in the suburbs of Boston,

Figure 4: Orpheus, 1839, Thomas Crawford

virtually ignored as an artist by the public and by art connoisseurs. William Rimmer worked in a manner which was antithetical to that of his contemporaries. Rimmer's work bore the mark of human suffering personally experienced. His was a singular statement in an era of cliche'.

CHAPTER TWO

William Rimmer's Developement

The most elusive and intriguing mystery of William Rimmer's life began long before his birth. The Reign of Terror in France of 1793 and the imprisonment and frequent execution of members of the French aristocracy were the backdrop to a romantic tale of rescue and escape from certain death. Historical legend records that the young Dauphin was led from the Temple in 1794 and hidden out of the reach of the ruling mob.[1] A young man brought up in South Lancashire, England as a son in the Rimer (sic) household believed all his adult life that he was the small French prince rescued from execution. His expectation of being restored to the throne was shattered by the re-entry of Louis XVIII into Paris in 1815. Thomas Rimer, unable to accept the accession of his supposed uncle in place of his own claim, resigned his commission in the British army and left England.[2]

The truth of Thomas Rimer's claim to royal birth is a moot point. Coincidence tantalizes: Thomas was educated at a standard of life above the station of the Rimer family; both the British and Russian crown exchequers supported his education; he was encouraged in the learning of languages an political history, and received at a younger than usual age a commission in the British army.[3] Also, Thomas is not

acknowledged as the biological son of the senior Rimer. The true Dauphin, however, would have been four years Thomas's senior by his recorded birth date, a disparity never addressed by Thomas.[4] It is safely assumed that if not the Dauphin, Thomas was a son of a French aristocrat exiled during the Reign of Terror. The fact remains though that Thomas Rimer and his heirs believed him to be the true King of France and lived out their lives in a secretive isolation always fearing the agents of Talleyrand and Fouche.[5]

Emigration to America was accompanied by a change in the family surname. Its spelling was changed to a double consonant, thus Rimer became Rimmer. Whether Thomas affected this en route to further cover his trail or it was the clumsy transcription of an immigration officer is not known. By the year 1817, Thomas, his wife, and year old son, William, had taken up residence in South Boston.

Thomas Rimmer practiced the cobbler's trade to support his family. He learned this skill as a youth in England and taught it to his sons. He also taught his sons to accept nothing less than perfection and to assume a position superior to their village neighbors. Thomas's attitudes won him no great admiration from any but his family, and consequently, his business was left largely unpatronized. The Rimmer family lived in chronic poverty, the quick temper and intolerance of Thomas exacerbating his already trouble-ridden business. Thomas also drank and his consumption increased as age and circumstance carried him farther from

his youth. Life in South Boston was a harsh contrast to his promised future in Paris. After much family discussion a last attempt was made to achieve royal recognition. A signet ring bearing the Bourbon lilies was sent to Queen Victoria as validation of Thomas Rimmer's claim to the French throne. No reply was ever received from the British monarch. With this silence went Thomas's last hope of connection to this believed birthright. This ostensible rejection plunged Thomas into a maddening depression heightened by his alcoholism and despair. It was told to a granddaughter years later that no medicine would quiet his hysterical cries and that the whole village listened as Thomas Rimmer railed to his death against the loss of his youthful promise.[6]

William Rimmer was the eldest of six children and since boyhood had assumed the responsibilities his father had failed to discharge. Thomas's oldest son was acutely aware of the quixotic nature of his father, as were all the Rimmer children who experienced their father's frustrations, and dangerously violent temper. There is no written record when William first perceived his father's embitterment and irrational view of mankind as wholly unjust and hard. But this realization was undoubtedly made early by William and he carried into adulthood his father's attitude of a betrayed prince.[7]

Thomas Rimmer was the first and most desperate example of what William Rimmer would later interpret as predestination. In his father he witnessed the destructive character of man's

psyche in its ability to render one incapable of overcoming reversal. He saw his father's potential darkened and destroyed by pessimism and despair. The obliteration of youthful promise would return as a theme in William Rimmer's mature sculptural work.

The despair of his father was William Rimmer's first subject translated into sculptural form. William Rimmer's Seated Youth, (fig. 5), carved of local gypsum in 1831 bears, according to Bartlett, a strong resemblance to both Thomas and the Bourbon line, (figs. 6 and 7).[8] The lobeless ears and hawk-bridged nose of Thomas are expertly handled in the small nude male figure. The sense of pent-up emotion also evokes the personality of his father; the hand clasped over the mouth and drawn-up posture aptly convey a picture of a man tensely brooding. It is a far different handling of human sorrow and anguish if compared to the popular sculpture of the day. Thomas Crawford's Orpheus, (fig. 4), of 1839 becomes compositionally bland and emotionally shallow when juxtaposed to Rimmer's image of fitful introspection. Crawford relies completely on a literary context to provide his expressive impetus. There is nothing inherent in the Orpheus to correspond to the harrowing search for his dead wife. Crawford's figure is a shell devoid of independent meaning and communicative power. By contrast, Rimmer's youthful translation of the powerful emotions of desolation and despair conveys itself from within the figure rather than depending upon an external narrative.

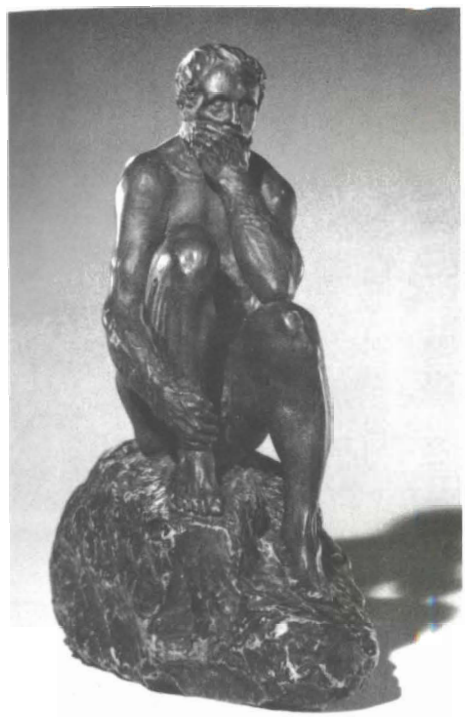

Figure 5: Seated Youth, 1931-32, William Rimmer

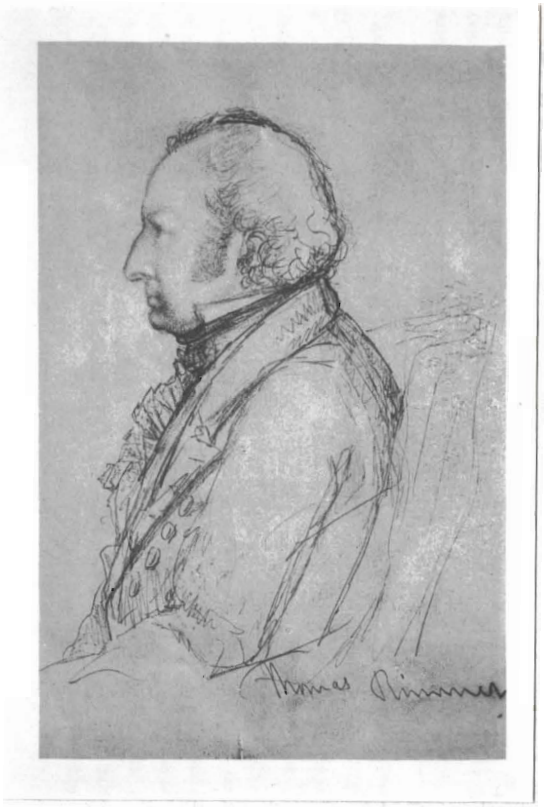

Figure 6: Thomas Rimmer, undated, William Rimmer

Figure 7: The Lost Dauphin, undated artist unknown.

Although Seated Youth pre-dates Orpheus by nearly a decade, the latter had been long credited as being the first male nude sculpted in America.[9] William Rimmer at age fifteen manifests in the Seated Youth a nascent skill and expressive power uncommon to American sculpture. His work eclipsed the efforts of his sculptural elders. William Rimmer's lifelong study of the human figure and particularily the male nude would result in some of the most provocative sculpture of the nineteenth century.

Rimmer's artistic skills had been encouraged from his infancy. The Seated Youth is indicative of his early interest in art and creative use of materials available to him. The small figure was carved from local gypsum, a plentiful material easily manipulated and free to the boy. The small size of the figure - it measures only ten and three-quarters inches in height - was dictated in part by the dimensions of available fragment, and also by the lack of formal sculpture tools in the Rimmer household.[10] Early (teenage) employment found Rimmer apprenticed to lithographers, soapmakers, type-setters, and a sign painter.[11] These efforts to earn added income for the family and the uneven tutelage of his father constituted the sum of what can be called William Rimmer's formal training in the arts.

An early estimation of Rimmer's skill and aesthetic aspiration comes from his 1838 apprenticeship in the shop of T. Moore, a lithographer. Benjamin Champney, also an apprentice, recorded his impression of a young William in

his Sixty Years Memories of Art and Artists. Champney remembered that William could, "indicate with a few strokes of his pencil the human figure in action," and that "He seemed to assimilate the grand qualities of the masters, and use them to illustrate his own ideas." In summation of the young man's aspriation, Champney asserted "He always aimed at the grandiose in art."[12] Champney's Memories offer a picture of Rimmer who at twenty was already serious in his art work, and who posessed an energy unsuited to a mere commercial draftsman.

Following the execution of the Seated Youth, Rimmer seems to have concentrated wholly upon two dimensionsal work. He and one Eldbridge Harris set up shop as sign painters in South Boston shortly after they both left T. Moore in 1839.[13] This venture had a brief life and no attributable work remains from the partnership. The next twenty years of Rimmer's life were to be divided between a variety of painting jobs and the study of medicine. Rimmer would not return to sculpture until the late 1850's.

Never a communicant in the Catholic church, William Rimmer enjoyed an unusually close working relationship with the Church and its clergy. Commissions of portraits and painted decorations are documented from 1839 to 1850 in the parishes fringing Boston. Rimmer prepared altar decorations under the direction of Father John Roddan, who was the great church builder of Boston. Rimmer and Father Roddan also enjoyed theological argument, Rimmer's interest in religion

and spiritualism lending itself better to debate than to the altar.[14]

For a time Rimmer kept a studio and sought to earn income from admission charged to view his paintings. This venture was of short duration and no financial gain. He next moved through the fringe communities of Boston painting portraits for between five and twenty-five dollars each.[15] Few examples remain of the portraits; they are as a group awkward and poorly composed.[16] Rimmer's interest lay elsewhere in the arts, his abilities and temperament being unsuited to the flattering recording of faces.

Marriage to Mary Peabody in 1840 and the concomitant increase in familial responsibilities necessitated a stable home and income. To accomplish this Rimmer put aside his artistic activities and took up the shoemaker's trade. The occupation of his father proved as poor a support to William as it had to Thomas. William's residence in Randolph in 1845 was the beginning of his long trial of poverty, rigorous study, and frustrated ambition. William Rimmer was forced to give up his youthful hope to meet his families' needs.

William Rimmer met Doctor A.W. Kingman of Brockton, MA while working in Randolph. Kingman became Rimmer's mentor in his private study of medicine. Loaning William books from his personal library and encouraging him to practice medicine, Kingman was convinced that Rimmer's great talents were wasted on the manufacture of shoes. Needing a larger income to support his growing family, Rimmer heeded Kingman's advice.[17]

Rimmer became a licensed physician in 1855.[18] Thereafter he proudly preceded his name with the medical title until his death in 1879. Although Rimmer was not formally schooled in medicine, his study with Dr. Kingman and local reknown for his cold pack treatment of cholera won him considerable respect as a physician. Rimmer's practice of medicine, however, failed to provide him with sufficient income; his practice among the poor quarry workers outside of Boston gained him little more income than the itinerant portraiture he had eschewed.

Rimmer's readings in Gray and Cruveilhier were accompanied by the direct study of human anatomy. Rimmer was granted access to the dissection rooms of Boston Medical College. There he gained an exhaustive knowledge of musculature and skeletal structure and their interrelationship. The time thus spent on medical study increased in Rimmer an already heightened sensitivity to anatomical articulation as a vehicle of aesthetic expression. Such anatomical study was quite unique for an American artist of the mid-nineteenth century. Rimmer's perseverance contributed not only to the perfection of his artistic style, but to the credibility of his later anatomy lectures.

In 1861, William Rimmer began his teaching career. Perhaps his most fufilling venture, the years at the Cooper Union were remembered as the happiest of his life. There and elsewhere on the East Coast he taught what is now understood as "artist's anatomy", a drawing technique dependent upon line

and a precise understanding of human form. From the reports of his students Rimmer was an inspired lecturer and draftsman.[19] His classes combined drawn example with attendant explanation, and it was said that he drew most brilliantly, pausing only to erase the previous lesson and begin anew.[20]

William Rimmer falls into that special breed of American artist who could combine science and graphic delineation. Charles Willson Peale, John James Audubon, and Thomas Eakins all practiced a style heavily dependent upon scientific analysis and empirical discovery.[21] Rimmer shared their genius in his ability to articulate and teach anatomy as both a science and an art.[22]

Rimmer's unheralded beginning in rented rooms of the Studio Building in Boston found a loyal and quickly increasing attendance. In short order he was provided with more prestigious quarters. Rimmer was offered a lecturer's post at the Lowell Institute in 1863, following there in the footsteps of both Jeffrey Wyman and Louis Agassiz as an instructor of anatomy.[23] This appointment constituted the highest accolade Rimmer would receive from Brahmin Boston.

The lectures given at Lowell were dynamic in their presentation. Rimmer developed a "chalk talk" method, drawing at the blackboard, lecturing, and circulating among the students to criticize and encourage in turn. At Lowell his classes included groups of men as well as women. Rimmer stated:

> I believe that art intellectually is as independent

> of sex as thought itself...I saw no reason why the same knowledge should not be conferred upon the one [gender] as well as the other.[24]

Rimmer's self-study of anatomy had convinced him that the methodical acquistion of knowledge through direct observation was the only acceptable manner in which to learn and he insisted upon the careful observation of the figure before its delineation. Rimmer believed that one had to first understand the inner mechanisms of the human body before one could articulate the outer shell.

The Lowell lectures were translated into Rimmer's first text, the Elements of Design. Published in 1864 in six volumes, it popularized Rimmer's chalk talk method of instruction. He diagrammed this method of lecture and example for "teachers, parents, students and draftsmen..."[25] Rimmer beleived completely in the appropriateness of his methodology which is still employed in the teaching of drawing and modelling.

Celebrity gained from both the Elements of Design, and his lecture series netted invitations to the comfortable homes of Boston. Such evenings usually consisted of conversation, dinner, and a brief discourse by Rimmer on his "art anatomy". His delivery of one such talk at an evening hosted by Mrs. A.C.L. Bottas resulted in an introduction to the Honorable Peter Cooper.[26] Cooper was impressed with Rimmer's program and invited him to teach in his school, the Cooper Union in New York City.

Rimmer inititiated a course for women at the Union in

the Fall of 1866, and in the next term was promoted to the directorship of the School of Design for Women. His program of study was rigorous, including drawing from life as well as casts, anatomy lectures, and structural botany. It was Rimmer's idea to challenge the prevailing, too-narrowly-defined vocational program by including a diversity of courses. Not all of his innovations were accepted vocational topics in the mid-nineteenth century.[27] Prevailing educational theory only allowed for instruction in the rudiments of drawing and basic composition. Exposure to the varied topics instituted by Rimmer were regarded as unnecessary and frivolous. Rimmer's increase of courses in the areas of comparative anatomy and historical studies during the three years of his directorship bred criticism among the trustees. Rimmer's ambition for the course and his pupils far exceeded that of the school's governing board. Questions as to the suitability of Rimmer for the direction of a vocational program were addressed to Peter Cooper, who initially stood by Rimmer. Rimmer quarreled with both Cooper and Abram Hewitt over his direction of the school, saying he had come to New York to "manage this school, not to be managed myself."[28] Rimmer's intractability led to his removal as director in 1870.

Rimmer refused to accept any other post at the Union after his dismissal from its leadership. He further refused to acknowledge any merit in the criticism of the trustees, remarking, "they are not artists."[29] Rimmer interpreted the dismissal as an indication of the board's short-sightedness

and ignorance. He took the demotion as a vote of no-confidence, ended his affiliation, and left New York a bitter man.

The dismissal from the Cooper Union did not diminish Rimmer's popularity as a lecturer. He was asked to guest lecture in Boston and other East Coast cities. An excellent record of his lectures exists in the Providence Daily Journal, (Providence, RI). A total of thirty-six lectures were delivered in that city, twelve of which were reported in the Journal during the winter of 1872.

Late in 1876 the Boston Museum of Fine Arts opened a School of Painting and Design.[30] Rimmer was asked to take charge of the course in anatomy, and later anatomical modelling. During the next year Rimmer had begun his second book, the Art Anatomy. His magnum opus, it is significant in its breadth of contents and accuracy of illustration. An encyclopedia of human expression achieved by underlying anatomical structure, the Art Anatomy paraphrases the treatises of Darwin in the Expression of Emotions in Man and Animals.[31]

From the time of his early teaching post at Lowell in 1863, William Rimmer's skill and peerless talent as an anatomist was never disputed. He became an inspiration to a generation of American artists that included Daniel Chester French and John LaFarge, and was advisor to William Morris Hunt. Hunt, who enjoyed the artistic stature never achieved by Rimmer, would send his students to Rimmer for drawing instruction and call upon Rimmer himself for anatomical correction of his own work.[32] It seems logical then that Rimmer would be

remembered as a teacher and anatomist, rather than as an artist. The enigmatic exception to this logic is that William Rimmer executed, in time stolen from his medical practice and teaching activities, the finest sculpture of his generation. It was the irony and continued agony of William Rimmer's life that he was ignored as an artist by the American public.

CHAPTER THREE

William Rimmer's Art Life

Whether as aid to or diversion from his self-study of medicine, Rimmer had by mid-century executed his second extant sculpture. Like the Seated Youth, (fig. 5), it is an intensely personal piece, but the Head of a Child, (fig.8), is devoid of its predecessor's compressed emotional turmoil. The Head of a Child was worked directly from the stone with Rimmer holding the block on his lap and observing his infant daughter as she passed about the room.[1] Her serious little face is softened by Rimmer's handling of the wispy baby hair and childish pout of her mouth. Communicated in this gentle handling of features is a father's deep love for his child.

This marble sculpture of his eldest daughter is Rimmer's second use of his child as model. An altarpiece painted while in Randolph contains a panel of the Infant St. Peter, 1845-47, (fig. 9). The child with swelling cheeks and serious expression is identified by Bartlett as that of William Rimmer's young son.[2] This was probably his third son, William II, who died in 1847. The baby has a series of five crowns above his head which are, in turn, beneath a larger crown. A lightly drawn winged figure encircles these. There is no iconographical explanation for this in the life of St.

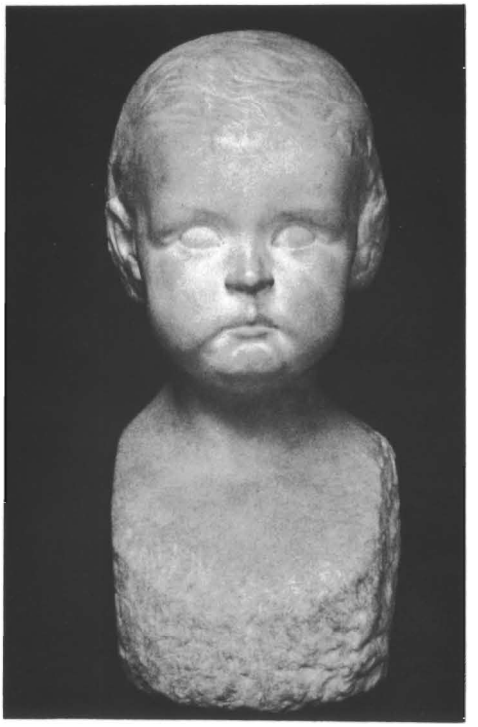

Figure 8: Head of a Child, 1849, William Rimmer.

Figure 9: Infant St. Peter, 1845-47
William Rimmer.

Peter. Both configurations later appear in the drawings of Rimmer and may suggest a personal symbolism of the crowning of martyrs or the anointing of Kings.

William Rimmer found immense joy in his family and in his children. He saw the promise of the future in their lives. His frustration in achieving any sort of outward success was salved by the hope for his sons' success and their continuance of his father's name. This hope for the next generation, however, was shattered. William and Mary Rimmer were parent to four sons but none of them grew out of babyhood. The crushing loss of his infant sons occurred in the same decade as the mental decline and death of his father and reinforced William's sense of genealogical denial. The little boys' deaths followed their births with a cruel regularity and left William with only three daughters to live after him. The years of the boys' births and deaths were also those of severe poverty, transience, and artistic obscurity. The memory of his father must have borne down upon William. His repeated failures followed the pattern established by Thomas. It was shortly after this period that Rimmer, in a letter to Stephen Perkins, would refer to fate as the "twin brother of death."[3] Bartlett asserts that from the time in his [Rimmer's] boyhood when he learned from his father the story of the latter's origin, he had cherished the hope that favoring fortune would eventually bring to him and to his sons their rightful inheritance of name and wealth. According to Bartlett, Rimmer interpreted

the birth of his own sons as an assurance that time would unravel the knot of fate, and that his cherished ambitions would be at last fufilled.[4] The death of the last son, Horace, in 1859 ended his hope for a male heir who would perpetuate his lineage.[5] Rimmer's few comments on the deaths of his sons seem to corroborate his belief that his tragedy was a part of the legacy of sorrow Fate had determined for him.[6]

In the late 1850's Rimmer began to concentrate on sculpture. His medical practice amongst the quarry workers of East Milton led him to sculpt in the local stone, granite. In 1858 Rimmer carved the head of a woman. Now lost, it is believed to have resembled a later piece, the Head of a Woman, (fig. 10), in the collection of the Corcoran Gallery. If this resemblance is accurate the features of the bust were of little note. Rimmer did not concern himself with portraiture per se in this work, given the classical repose of the face and standard bust cut. Of note is that Rimmer once again cut directly into the rough granite without mechanical aid and the owner, being pleased with this effort, thereupon supplied Rimmer with more granite.

The owner of the Head of a Woman was Stephen Perkins of Boston. Perkins met William Rimmer at a low point in the latter's life. The East Milton community was unsympathetic to Rimmer as an artist and indifferent to him as a physician. The new friendship completely enhanced William Rimmer's chances to achieve the artistic celebrity he sought and allieviated the financial constraints on his work. Stephen

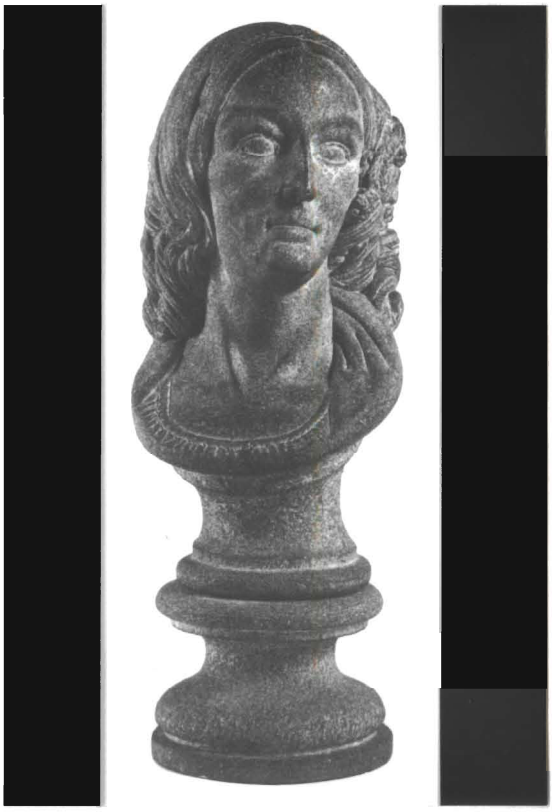

Figure 10: Head of a Woman, 1858-59, William Rimmer.

Perkins was convinced that Rimmer would be known as the sculptural genius of his generation and set about to have William demonstrate his virtuousity to the American art public. Perkins admonished a hesitant Rimmer, "Be an artist, there are plenty of doctors."[7] At forty-five, William Rimmer was offered his first real hope of making his name as a sculptor in America.

Perkins had given Rimmer additional granite. From this stone Rimmer cut a portrait head of the Christian martyr St. Stephen. His choice of subject was to honor his patron's name saint. Rimmer's finished work, however, is not a cool classical study as in the Head of a Woman, but a study of physical pain and emotional suffering. Rimmer's completion of the St. Stephen, (fig. 11), in 1860 followed fifteen years of poverty, anguish, and bereavement. The pained expression of the saint must be considered within this context. The St. Stephen was unlike any portrait head previously cut in America.[8]

The St. Stephen, measuring twenty-two inches was carved directly into the granite block without the benefit of a model, machine or preliminary study. Rimmer worked himself to physical and nervous exhaustion, completing the head in December of 1860 after a feverish month's labor.[9] The bulk of the piece indicates Rimmer's herculean effort. The granite texture caused him to reforge his chisels each half hour, and he retired from his work at day's end with cut hands and shoulders swollen from the physical exertion.[10]

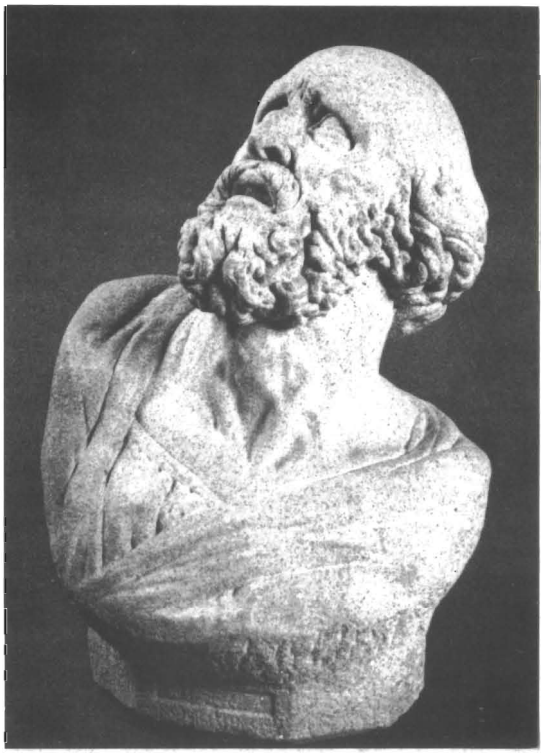

Figure 11: St. Stephen, 1860, William Rimmer.

Rimmer's facile handling of human anatomy and his intuitive ability to bring forth a figure from the virgin stone always insured his work's technical merit. But it was Rimmer's capacity to imbue his work with the passion of his own tribulations that set apart the St. Stephen and later works from the static technical perfection of his contemporaries. Rimmer and his subject seem to interchange selves; in the unjust persecution of St. Stephen, Rimmer could easily see his own abuse at the blind hand of Fate. A carefully woven double meaning is plausible, given the choice of subject and articulation of the stone. The bust portrait is no longer a simple formal essay as in the Head of a Woman. Rimmer symbolically casts his own visage in the St. Stephen. The saint is shown as a tired man marked with middle age and grimacing with the pain of his impending demise. Moreover, the constricted cry of the saint against the pain of death might well be a picture of Rimmer worn by the labor of his creation. It is Kirstein's assertion that the choice of St. Stephen, a martyr, reflects both Rimmer's state of mind in 1860 and the physical price exacted from Rimmer in carving the bust.[11]

The suggestion of double meaning and personal symbolism would continue in the later work of Rimmer. His style would develop from his anatomical studies into a highly expressive naturalism most easily likened to the Hellenistic sculptural style. Rimmer must not be taken as an objective realist despite his veristic handling of the human form.

In a period preoccupied with sentimental cliché and surface perfection, Rimmer eschewed both not for the sake of empiricism but to explore the emotive possibilities of sculpture. His work was met by a public unprepared for such powerful essays, consequently he remained unheralded while men of lesser talent and greater business acumen achieved the stature to which he aspired.

The St. Stephen, however, was not unnoticed. Exhibited at the Williams and Everett Gallery in Boston, it received favorable notices in the Boston newspapers and elicited interest from gallery patrons. Stephen Perkins championed Rimmer as another "Michel Angelo", and worked to find a buyer for the bust. To both men's dismay no one offered to buy the piece at the five hundred dollar asking price, or any other.[12]

Perkins remained steadfast in his support of Rimmer and funded Rimmer's subsequent work. Rimmer recorded in his diary on January 27, 1861, "Received from Mr. Perkins a hundred dollars with which to begin the statue of the Falling Gladiator." The subject already in mind, Rimmer began work within the week on what would be his first full-length figure.[13]

From the first Rimmer was beset with difficulties in the execution of the Gladiator. His East Milton studio was in the small unheated basement of his house and his clay froze and cracked in the bitter Boston winter. Rimmer seems to have either been ignorant of armatures or unwilling to

pay the ironmonger's fee for construction of a frame. This led to an unavoidable imbalance of the unsupported material, exacerbated by Rimmer's stacking up of the clay masses and carving into the bulk rather than adding bits to build up the figure. The local interest in the oddity of the doctor-sculptor attracted many curious townspeople to his studio. Perkin's attempt to publicize his protegé only served to distract Rimmer from the little work time he was able to steal from his medical practice. Rimmer having overcome these various obstacles, ultimately saw his finished figure nearly destroyed by the workmen whose task it was to cast it in plaster.[14]

The Falling Gladiator, (figs. 12a, 12b, 12c), survived its precarious beginning and in its finished state illustrates as no other sculptural work Rimmer's devotion to the heroic male nude as a vehicle to express emotion and idea.[15] The nude warrior embodied Rimmer's symbolic fusion of nobility and defeat. He perfectly measured the involuntary reaction of the gladiator's body succumbing to a death blow and created from this a dramatic composition based on the violence of combat and death. In the Falling Gladiator, Rimmer wholly rejected the traditional definition of sculptural form in favor of his own non-literary expression of the emotions unleashed by the mortal blow.[16] The Gladiator relied upon no literary explanation to express the violence of death in the arena.

The taut arc that delineates the front of the stricken

Figures 12a and 12b: Falling Gladiator, 1869, William Rimmer.

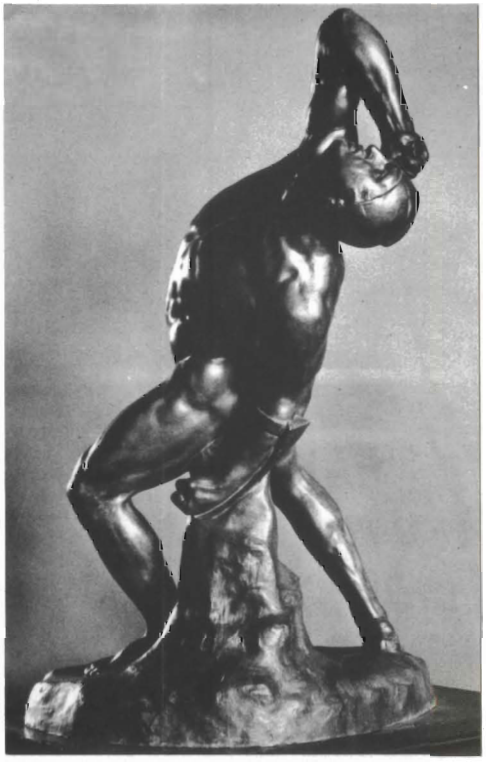

Figure 12c: Falling Gladiator, 1907 bronze cast, William Rimmer.

figure is complemented in the crush of muscular tissue occurring in the back. All the heroic strain of the figure is placed in direct opposition to the abdominal crumble of the left side. The muscled shoulder slackens and tensed arm has begun to weigh heavily in its thong. The clenched fist is a last gesture of defiance. The Gladiator does not cry out against his fate as did St. Stephen. Instead, his visage expresses blank disbelief at the unexpected transition of his body from responsive strength to vulnerable weakness.

Rimmer created a dynamic posture of sinuous tension. With great sophistication the figure reads well from all angles. The action seems to be directed at all points as the gladiator seeks to resist impending demise. The oscillating rhythm of his contour carries the eye all around. This dynamic yet taut energy expresses the anguished attempt to escape death. It is as if Fate is something to be outrun. Rimmer's warrior strains outward as he is pulled down by his ebbing strength. There is a double strain in this striving to go on while falling back. The body attempts to move away from the inertia of death.

Rimmer focuses upon the denouement of a mortal battle. His figure's lonely contemplation of death has been cited by both Bartlett and Kirstein as an echo of the artist's acknowledgement of his own lost battle. As the gladiator falls in combat, so too was Rimmer bowing to his spiritual exhaustion. Rimmer wrote in reference to the Gladiator,

> And I looked at him with many bitter thoughts as one might look upon the son of a great King, wondering of his strange fortune, who, knowing not his inheritance, was a gladiator having no call but to shed blood at another's will.[17]

The latter two-thirds of the quote had been scratched out by Rimmer but remain legible in one of his notebooks; it is as though he found the lines too revealing of his thoughts.

The Falling Gladiator was viewed by an art public unprepared to appreciate its form and expression. Hailed by J. Elliot Cabot as overcoming the tendency to value poetic content over form, the work failed publicly for just that reason.[18] Cabot's praise was not seconded by any other contemporary art critic in America. Rimmer's fusion of turbulent form and expression independent of overt moralizing or didacticiam found no advocates among the American public.[19]

Stephen Perkins recognized the limited reception Rimmer could hope for in America. Finding the attention accorded his protegé primarily based on the curiosity of a physician-artist, he resolved to make Rimmer's name famous in Europe. To whit, he booked passage in 1862 and either took the cast of the Gladiator with him, or had it shipped (records are not clear on this point), to London and later to Paris. Exhibited in the Paris Salon des Refusés of 1863, the Gladiator aroused much comment as to its probable casting from life, a charge to be similarly leveled against Rodin fifteen years later.[20]

The quarrel was successfully ended by the attempt of a group of young French sculptors to assume the pose. Finding it impossible, they hailed their American compatriot as a master of both anatomy and expression.[21]

Following the Salon des Refuses, Perkins took the Gladiator with him to Florence. There he intended to set up a studio. His purpose was to attract Rimmer to Europe to create additional sculpture. The cast never travelled well; major repairs were frequently necessary to reattach limbs and stabilize the sculpture. Upon arrival in Florence the Gladiator was found to have been nearly destroyed. Oddly enough, it was Hiram Powers who was charged by Perkins to repair the piece. Powers' insertion of steel rods into the cast provided stability to withstand further exhibit and travel.

Rimmer never again attempted anything on so heroic a scale. The Falling Gladiator exhausted him physically and emotionally. During its execution he suffered heart palpitations and fits of anxiety.[22] The transmission of so much technical skill and personal feeling into sculptural form would not end in Rimmer's work, but would never again assume the dimension of the Gladiator.

That Rimmer did not graduate from the Gladiator into a full time practice of sculpture was not solely the fault of an unprepared public. Throughout William Rimmer's life he seemed to draw back from success when it was at his door. His art as dictated by his temperament was not

practible, as its public rejection in America had shown. His extreme introspection coupled with erratic social graces also made him difficult company. Rimmer did little to correct this situation. Using his family as a buffer against harsh realities, he lived more for them and for the flights of his own aesthetic imagination.[23] In protecting this private world he ironically threw away chance after chance to achieve the artistic stature he craved.

Rimmer's one real opportunity to achieve a public reputation came in 1864. Stephen Perkins' publicizing of his friend aroused the interest of his Cabot cousins and the notice of several influential Bostonians. The desire of a Mr. Thomas Lee to endow Boston with a statue of the statesman Alexander Hamilton culminated in the award of $5,000.00 to Rimmer for the construction of a larger-than -life-size memorial.[24] Success with Hamilton loomed as Rimmer's key to subsequent lucrative commissions and his artistic celebrity.

The statue, still standing at the head of Commonwealth Avenue in Boston, pleased the artist as well as Hamilton's descendants. Nonetheless, Hamilton, (fig. 13), sculpted in Concord granite, found minimal public acceptance. The simple toga-like cloak employed by Rimmer to complement the introspective quality of Hamilton's face is an eloquent integration of form and expression of the man's character. However, to the man in the street Rimmer's figure was neither the embodiment of America's Puritan forefathers,

Figure 13: Alexander Hamilton, 1865, William Rimmer

nor that of the classical hero popularized during the Federal period. Hamilton, despite its monolithic presence, conveys more the aspect of a brooding lawyer than a paradigm of the young republic. Neither Perkins' nor Cabot's laudatory remarks could change public opinion, and Rimmer would never again receive a major public commission.

Rimmer seemed unaware and unconcerned by the rejection of his Hamilton. He took characteristic pride in his speed of execution, reporting to have spent only eleven days on the figure's construction.[25] As had been done in the Gladiator, the work was initially modelled from a built mass of clay without supporting armature. Once again the clay froze and cracked in the December chill and frequently broke apart, adding labor to the already arduous project. Rimmer used neither a preliminary study nor a human model, relying as was his wont upon his imagination and intuition. Uncharacteristic of Rimmer's oeuvre was the final cutting of Hamilton in granite which was done by quarry men rather than by the artist himself.[26]

The failure of the Hamilton statue had cost Rimmer his future as a sculptor in Boston. Yet, Rimmer in his one recorded comment on the work indicated that, given another opportunity, he would have finished the back with more care.[27]

Stephen Perkins wrote to Rimmer on December 23, 1868, exhorting and encouraging him to persevere despite public

indifference. Perkins advised Rimmer that,

> This very fact of the bad taste and bad art makes me desirous that you should put at least one work, expressing your ideas of beauty, and dignity, and exhibiting your full science, into a permanent form...the work might not be valued at its true value during my lifetime or yours- but all truly meritorious work, put on record, and kept before the public is fairly estimated at last.[28]

Rimmer answered Perkins with a singularly profound sculptural form.

In 1871, the year after his resignation from the Cooper Union, Rimmer executed his final major sculpture. The Dying Centaur, (fig. 14), carved of built up clay masses, is a visual document of Rimmer's belief in a dual presence in man's nature.[29]

Rimmer may have derived inspiration for the Centaur from Stuart and Revett illustrations of the Parthenon friezes found in the Boston Athenaeum Collection. Visits to the Athenaeum by Rimmer are documented in the early 1860's; his acquaintance with Perkins had opened the collection's private doors. However, Rimmer's Centaur lacks the classical calm of the available source material. The sculptor again chooses the moment of physical collapse and imbues the figure's being with a sense of tortuous anguish.

No model was used in the carving of the Centaur.[30] Rimmer conceived a scheme in his mind and relied upon his technical skill to achieve anatomical accuracy. The melding of man and beast is flawless and the Centaur is rendered plausibly. Through a masterful handling of

Figure 14: Dying Centaur, 1869-71, William Rimmer.

anatomy the mythological beast is made believeable.

Rimmer had explored the expression of emotion in man and animals. His observation of his father's struggle resulted in the perception of an animalistic nature in man. This bestial side competed with man's reason, and often conquered man's rationality. The Centaur is a visual statement of Rimmer's conception of man's animal nature vying with his human one. Half-man and half-beast the creature falls and fails in its heroic struggle against death. The thrown back torso of the man grasps upward clinging to life, as if to seek some ultimate spiritual transcendance, while the animal half lies rooted in the paralysis of death and prevents the creature's rise. The death posture of the Centaur creates an atmosphere of life's anguished ebb and the ultimate frustration of the human spirit.

The Dying Centaur stands as a metaphor for Rimmer's own existence. The Centaur expresses the anguish and emotional turbulence William had witness in his father's life and experienced in his own. Belonging neither to the human nor the animal world, the creature is a symbol of displacement. As such, the Centaur confronts his fate bereft of comfort from either world. So, too, in 1871 was Rimmer struggling between the world of his aesthetic muse and the world of practical success. His father's legacy of basking in adversity and his own attitude of a betrayed prince left Rimmer unable to accommodate

himself to the realities of his life. In the Centaur Rimmer had created from his own despair and isolation a romantic symbol and in it he expressed his lonely quixotic battle.

The Dying Centaur is an evocation of Rimmer's artistic career. Despite his notable grace, power, and expenditure of energy, the creature falls and fails. Albert Ten Eyck Gardner corroborates this view, equating the sculpture with:

> a wild pagan creature...sinking to earth with amputated arm stretching its handless stump to a pitiless Puritan sky. This is what society could do to an artist who loved art more than literature, who dared express ideas by form rather than props prescribed by convention. They could let him squander his great talents and exhaust his mind lecturing on anatomy.[31]

CHAPTER FOUR

A Personal Iconography

William Rimmer persisted in the use of intensely personal themes throughout his career. In drawn and sculpted forms, he revealed a host of visual clues to his ideological wellspring. Rimmer's heroic male figures are iconographical manifestations of an inner torment.

The maintenance of an individual style in an era of sculptural redundancy is the most unique fact of William Rimmer's art life. This individuality is the most defineably romantic quality he posessed.[1] American Romanticism of the mid-nineteenth century was often characterized by the pursuit of private imagery.[2] That Rimmer's art evolved from within himself, and reflected more his imagination than an established aesthetic canon, is one characteristic that places him within the Romantic tradition. His imagery involved the use of many different and, at times, seemingly contradictory sources. Rimmer also invoked and manipulated given subject matter to express his fatalism.

Rimmer relied on his imagination and memory. Only in teaching did he suggest the use of an actual model. In his own work, Rimmer disdained the actual, preferring to

let loose his pen to record the images of his fertile mind. This would produce an exaggerated sense of the human form. Regarding this practice, Rimmer maintained that, "In art we want the highest ideal generalizations, and our interest declines when individual pecularities are given instead."[3] Rimmer's lack of interest in the physically real enabled him to concentrate on the sublime.

Compared to his contemporaries, Rimmer's most salient stylistic difference is evident in his artistic handling of death.[4] Popular sculpture depicted death as having already occurred; the peace of eternal sleep was upon the figure's brow. Rimmer records the drama of death's blow, the intense pain and incredulity at life's ebb. Moreover, his works are elicitations of the awful awareness of unfufilled goals and thwarted aspirations which often accompanies death. Rimmer's imagery offers a disturbing reminder of every man's ultimate and inexorable fate.

Rimmer's fascination with the theme of shattered hopes is seen in his depictions of the Fall of Man. He read Milton, the Bible and classical mythology to understand man's flaws and failings. Rimmer's ideas resembled those of William Blake (1757-1827), concerning man's "internal demon".[5] Both Rimmer and Blake derived much from the epic poem of John Milton, Paradise Lost. Milton's Satan is central to both men's interpretations of man's Fall.

Paradise Lost was written by John Milton in 1667.

It had experienced a revival of interest in the early to mid-nineteenth century. The definition of Satan as the hero of Milton's epic received much attention in Rimmer's lifetime. Satan, the personification of evil was not in Milton's words a "creature misshapen by his fall", but a "beautiful fallen angel."[6]

Rimmer's concept of Satan parallels Milton's ascription of physical beauty. Rimmer, however, visually intensifies such an image:

> He should have great beauty, very great arrogance, and throughout the whole figure should be felt a certain warp of bone, muscle, and expression: thus producing a subtleness in keeping with the character.[7]

Rimmer sought to show demonstratively the pervasive internal flaw in even the most idealized physical countenance.

The image of the falling figure received a great deal of attention from Rimmer in which he examined man's physical and emotional response to his fate. In the drawing, Nine Days They Fell, (fig. 15), Rimmer focuses on a spiral of activity to express the Fall. The figures in this work fall involuntarily, their idealized bodies void of the strength to stay their descent. Writhing bodies of anonymous men grasp out toward the void much in the same manner of Rimmer's Dying Centaur, (fig. 14), in a shared attitude of desperate hope. Rimmer's figures reel backwards into the "bottomless pit" of Milton, from whence their souls will be ultimately proscribed by the

Figure 15: Nine Days They Fell, undated, William Rimmer.

sin of their Fall.[8]

The notion of a paradise inexorably lost reinforced Rimmer's own belief in the deterministic necessity of man's fall, that no man can exist as an unflawed, untormented being. He would go on to express through his forms the emotional suffering imposed upon man by this inevitable fall. Rimmer seems to reflect in his art the continual unrequited struggles of his own life. The pain of unjust or misunderstood suffering becomes central to Rimmer's imagery.

No better image of the pain of an unjust suffering of an innocent person exists than in the biblical figure of Job. Job became one of Rimmer's favorite subjects.[9] The theme of Job's irrational punishment appears several times in Rimmer's artistic corpus.

Job had been caught in a wager between Satan and God. He was rendered powerless by God to resist any of Satan's torments. Job, a true and faithful servant of God sees all his worldly goods lost, his children killed and his social status denied. Job, however, does not condemn God as cruel; he acknowledges the omnipotence of God and declares his own ignorance to be the root of his suffering.[10]

Job's effort to maintain his faith in the face of undeserved suffering is not unlike Rimmer's own perception of his artistic and genealogical rejection. When Job in chapter 30, verse 16-22 despairs that, "now his soul

is dissolved within him and days of affliction are upon him", it is not so different from Rimmer's perception of his ongoing struggle.

Rimmer's use of the falling figure in many ways echoes that of William Blake. Both men attribute man's fall to internal flawing precipitated by an external force, and both allude to a spiritual torment. Rimmer's figures do not plummet headlong to their fate though; his falling figures are given a dual gesture suggestive of both reaching out towards a hope for redemption while nonetheless falling back into torment.

Rimmer's double gesture is exemplified in the male figure in the drawing of 1869, Evening, Fall of Day, (fig. 16). A winged male figure falls, as if from heaven, his great wings arched elegantly in opposition to the vigorous grasp of his outstretched hand. The torso is bent back, the taunt arc heightened by rippling muscles and the backward thrust of his head. Evening is a figure at the point of collapse; the inevitability of his ultimate fall is manifest.[11] The figure Evening, like the Gladiator and Centaur is an essay in the double gesture. It shares a similar posture of recoil and empty grasp.

Rimmer's companion piece to Evening is Morning, (fig. 17). The latter drawing was also executed in 1869, and is in the same medium and is the same size as Evening. Though not formally acknowledged by Rimmer as paired works,

Figure 16: Evening, The Fall of Day, 1869, William Rimmer.

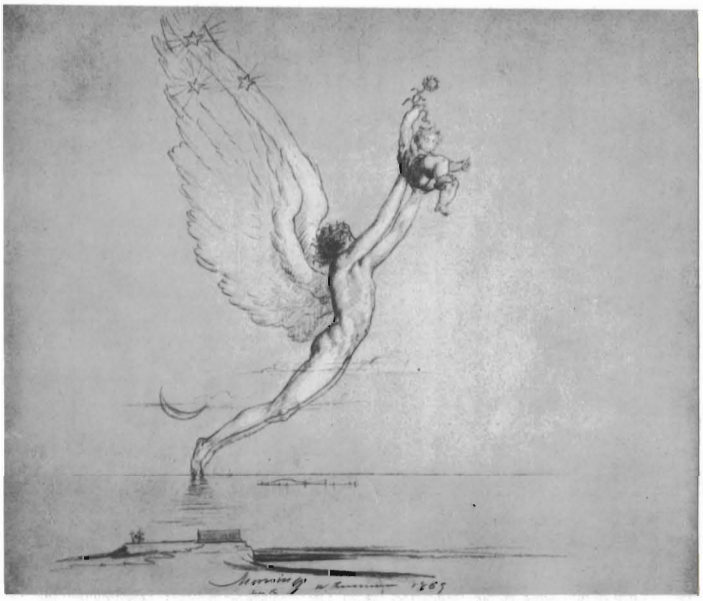

Figure 17: Morning, 1869.
William Rimmer.

the correspondence suggests a strong thematic relationship. Evening and Morning are the natural opposites of each other in composition and allegorical translation.

In Morning, a winged male figure stretches forward to the sky. His toes touch a sea whose shore is classical antiquity as indicated by a Doric temple. The figure holds forth a baby round and vigorous who clutches a blossom. Evening's anguish is replaced in Morning by a feeling of new beginning. The infant is life's potential unblemished by adulthood's fall.[12] Morning entails figural postures seldom repeated in the work of Rimmer. The image of Morning was one of youthful joyousness, of physical and spiritual wellbeing. Its thematic implications, however, comprise brief flickers with Rimmer's overall oeuvre.

Although Rimmer was a close observer of and true master of human antomy, his figural work does not present the viewer with a cool analysis of the male figure. In Rimmer's hands the male anatomy is turned into an ideological and emotional vehicle. Rimmer's male figures are allegories of their maker.

Rimmer's quoted disdain of the recording of "individual pecularity" in the artistic rendering of a figure carried into the realm of anatomical omission. His half-remembered and half-imagined male heroes are sexless. Their athletically muscled bodies are without genitalia. Rimmer's male heroes express a visual impotence that arguably parallels the artist's own self-perception.

Rimmer's inner torment expressed itself in the victimization of his heroic male nudes. His seeming inability to break the bitter pattern of failure left by his father appears visually in his heroes' vain struggle against death. They fall despite their physical prowess as result of an unseen blow which they are incapable of escaping or countering. The agonized awareness of impending demise in Rimmer's figures is the expression of his own feelings of helplessness and frustration in achieveing an artistic reputation. Rimmer, despite his great talents, was incapable of directing his efforts toward his desired artistic status.

The phantom heritage of Rimmer imposed goals he was unable to fufill. The obligation of a king was that he provide a male heir, and Rimmer's belief in the supposed birthright of his father imposed this obligation upon him. Rimmer suffered the deaths of four sons in their infancy and, though a father to daughters, the latter comprised no direct line of succession.

Rimmer's emasculation of his heroic male nudes is an expression of his inability to resolve the dissolution of his father's reputed birthright. He bestows on the nude an awesome physical presence contradicted by its complete vulnerability to an unseen foe. Rimmer's great talents likewise were continually victim to the insuperable foes of public taste and private torment. His failure to achieve artistic success or insure the immortality of

his father's name confirmed Rimmer's fatalism. Rimmer's anguished outlook became the creative wellspring of his artistic work. The bitter defeats he interpreted as a predestined part of this fate are the genesis of his emasculation of the heroic male nude.

Rimmer's art stands as a provocative fusion of anatomical observation and searing emotional turmoil unmatched by any artists of his generation. His intensity of expression was unappreciated by an art public accustomed to more pedestrian modes of representation. Rimmer's work was too personal and too confrontational in its conveyance of human pain and suffering to be comfortably apprehended by his audience. And in an age of the idealized female, Rimmer clung stubbornly to the nude male as his expressive vehicle. His nudes lacked the pristine beauty of Powers' and Crawford's stylish marbles and appeared rough and crude to viewers accustomed to elegant polished surfaces. Rimmer's work was simply too ugly in form and expression for the eye of his audience, and for this reason he remained in obscurity. But in obscurity, Rimmer created a body of work unequaled in power of expression until the modern era of American sculpture.

CONCLUSION

In an age of sentimental artifice, William Rimmer's expressions of the raw emotions arising from struggle and death are sculptural anomalies. His lack of success in attaining a public reputation is in no way an adequate measure of his place in the history of American art. The fact of his sculptural work's uniqueness is that which condemned him to obscurity in his own time and that which warrants critical review today.

Rimmer maintained the tradition of the heroic male nude. His use of it as a personal symbol aside, he introduced the Hellenistic concept of a heroic male nude to America. To his disadvantage, this occurred in an era preoccupied with the nude female. Excepting Rimmer, the heroic male anatomy would not be explored in American art until the modern era.

Romantic in his themes of Promethean struggle, Rimmer created a world in his art that appears to have been caught out of a dream. His use of fantasy, mythology, and nightmare is very like the painters of his time, Vedder and Ryder. In painting this tendency became known as a Romantic Visionary sub-school within Romanticism. Rimmer's sculpted figures are the first example of this

in American sculpture.

The major contribution by Rimmer to American sculpture can be lost in the minutia of his personal struggle. Rimmer's sculpted figures' expression of his inner torment resulted in a powerful fusion of artistic form and feeling. Rimmer's figures required no elaborate textual explanation and carried within their forms their meaning. Although by no means a modernist, Rimmer's sculptural power and finesse make his figures interesting to the modern eye and eclipses the work of his better known contemporaries.

Notes for the Introduction:

1 Truman Bartlett, The Art Life of William Rimmer, 1882 rpt., (New York: Kennedy Graphics, 1970), p.6

2 Bartlett, p. 104.

Notes for Chapter One:

1 Daniel Mendelowitz, A History of American Art, (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p.230.

2 Mendelowitz, p. 233.

3 Albert Ten Eyck Gardner, Yankee Stonecutters, (New York: Columbia Press, 1945), p. 5.

4 Nathaniel Hawthorne, The French and Italian Notebooks, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1883), p. 335.

5 Mendelowitz, p. 234.

6 Wayne Craven, Sculpture in America, (New York: Crowell Co., 1968), p. 161.

7 Mendelowitz, p. 236.

8 Marcia Goldberg, "William Rimmer, An American Romantic Sculptor" Thesis, Oberlin College, 1972, p. 8.

9 Craven, p. 125.

10 Craven, p. 125.

11 Charles Walters, "Hiram Powers and William Rimmer: A Study in the Concept of Expression" Diss, University of Michigan, 1977, p. 188.

12 Gardner, p. 72.

Notes for Chapter Two:

1 Rupert Furneaux, The Last Days of Marie Antoinette and Louis XVI,(New York: The John Day Co., 1971), p.236.

2 Bartlett, p. 2

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